



House Select Committee on Homeland Security Democrats

JIM TURNER, Ranking Member

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Congressman Jim Turner, Ranking Member of the Select Committee on Homeland Security made the following statement at a hearing of the full committee on “Information sharing after September 11: Perspectives on the Future.”

Mr. Chairman, thank you for scheduling this hearing and I'd like to join you in welcoming this distinguished panel.

Let me begin by saying that coordination at the highest levels of our government on homeland security information sharing is sorely lacking. And there couldn't be a better example of that than the unfortunate episode that occurred just three weeks ago, when Attorney General Ashcroft and Department of Homeland Security Secretary Tom Ridge issued what amounted to contradictory, dueling public statements on the very same day regarding the current threat posed by al Qaeda to the American public.

A joint Ashcroft-Ridge press release two days later, to paper over the differences, could hardly undo the damage. Their statements left the American public utterly confused and asking questions once again about the Administration's fundamental ability to accurately judge the threat posed by al Qaeda and ensure the security of the homeland.

I think Chairman Cox hit the nail right on the head three weeks ago when he said “The absence of Secretary Ridge from yesterday's news conference held by the Attorney General and the FBI Director, and the conflicting public messages their separate public appearances delivered to the nation, suggests that the broad and close interagency consultation we expect – and which the law requires – did not take place in this case.”

Inconsistent public comments by Cabinet officials are only where the problems begin, however. There are a number of areas where the Administration is not tightening and improving basic information sharing structures and procedures.

As the Markle Report, Gilmore Commission and soon to be released 9/11 Commission Report has, or will, point out, we are falling short on three vital tasks:

- collecting information and tips effectively from State and local officials;
- synthesizing the counterterrorism analysis of the various and newly created intelligence fusion centers at DHS, DOJ and DoD;
- and the federal government sharing its information with first responders in a timely manner remains a work in progress.

I thought a chart would be helpful to all of us in showing the multiple lines of

communication that now exist between the federal government and first responders. The chart demonstrates how we're building separate, competing systems run by rival agencies to convey threat information to first responders.

At DHS, we have the Homeland Security Information Network. At DOJ, we have the Regional Intelligence Sharing System. At DoD, it appears that the Joint Regional Information Exchange System, better known as JRIES (JAY-REES), is another channel of communication in use. And it's my understanding that TTIC is building out an online information system to reach first responders as well.

Basically, despite good intentions, I would submit that we are building multiple, parallel information sharing systems that cause more confusion for first responders and fail to ensure that all information gets to everyone that needs it.

In times of emergency, who do first responders call? Who do they rely on? Which information network should they turn to? These are legitimate, important pressing questions that the federal government needs to get a better handle on.

The Markle Foundation has aptly pointed out in its comprehensive report that there are major weaknesses in how the Executive branch defines the respective roles, responsibilities, and authorities of the federal agencies involved in assessing and disseminating homeland security information. This lack of coherence is leading to turf battles among agencies, gaps in interagency information sharing and analysis, and limited attempts to protect civil liberties. We can and need to do better on managing interagency information sharing.

One manifestation of this lack of clarity is the proliferation of counterterrorism and intelligence fusion centers within the federal government leading to duplication of intelligence analysis.

In the 2003 State of the Union address the President announced the creation of the Terrorist Threat Integration Center which would "merge and analyze all threat information in a single location." The fact of the matter is that the CIA, FBI, DOJ, DoD, DIA and DHS have all retained their own separate terrorist intelligence fusion centers. Competitive analysis of intelligence is, of course, a healthy practice. But creating and maintaining multiple intelligence centers is a recipe for continued confusion, and the failure to coordinate the work of these various centers and agencies has real world consequences.

In summary, Mr. Chairman, over 30 months after 9/11, it appears that we are still a very long way from solving what has been identified as the main reason the federal government failed to detect and prevent that historic and unfortunate attack on our nation.

Again, I appreciate our witnesses taking the time to prepare testimony and appear here today. And I look forward to hearing their expert views on how we can improve information sharing for the sake of protecting the American people.

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